

~~SECRET~~

NSC REF ID: A66411
Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

OCF-0208/55

SYRIAN TENDENCY TOWARD COMMUNISM

BACKGROUND

Syria
M

I. Communism in Syria

25X1C8b

25X1C8b A. Syria is "the most worrisome spot in the confused Middle East" in the opinion of [REDACTED]

25X1C8b

[REDACTED] a Communist take-over there is not imminent but that the tendency is in the direction of Communism.

B. Communists in Syria are thoroughly exploiting the political freedom permitted them by the weak cabinets that have held office in Syria since the overthrow of dictator Shishakli in February. There is no immediate obstacle to the growing effectiveness of Communist propaganda and infiltration.

1. Though outlawed since 1947, the Communists--led by Moscow-trained Khalid Bakdash and numbering about 10,000 in a population of 3,500,000--are carefully cultivating an air of respectability as they freely reorganize after four years of suppression at the hands of Shishakli.
2. Bakdash has been elected to parliament--probably the first Communist in any Arab parliament--and now sits on the foreign affairs committee of that body. The minister of justice, who is also director of propaganda and information, is a friend of Bakdash and was minister of interior when the Communist Party

Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

came into the open last spring. A Communist officer directs the army's cultural affairs program and reportedly distributes Communist literature to seventy subordinate officers throughout Syria.

3. Two Communists and one supporter have been elected to the nine-member governing board of Syria's major labor federation. The president of the federation is a non-Communist but has shown a willingness to collaborate with them. The American embassy in Damascus reports that the Communists have "bought" one-third of the Syrian press and that another third follows the Communist line.
 4. As long as this process of infiltration goes unchecked --and the major conservative parties seem too weak to stop it--Syrian Communists will probably acquire a pre-eminence rare in the public life of any Arab state.
- C. Communists are now collaborating with the extremist Arab Socialist-Resurrectionist Party, with the rightist Moslem Brotherhood and with opportunistic independents led by Khalid al Azm in an effort to upset the ineffectual government of Prime Minister Faris al Khouri. These groups are stifling pro-Western forces in Syria by continuously calling on "the street elements" to give vent to Syria's bitterly anti-Western nationalism.

~~SECRET~~

Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

~~SECRET~~

Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

1. Since Khouri took office on 29 October, these extremists have monopolized Syrian attention with demonstrations or protests against Iran's execution of Communists, French policy in North Africa, Egypt's execution of Moslem Brotherhood members and the annual conference of the American Middle East chiefs of mission. Khouri's government--the target of this agitation--appears paralyzed.
2. The downfall of Khouri--an octogenarian who expressed a wish about a day after he took office to resign by 21 March at the latest--might bring to power a pro-leftist government in which Communists would have--for them in Syria--unprecedented influence. The only apparent obstacle to this development is the continuing possibility of a rightist military coup. The center parties--the Nationalists under ex-president Shukri Quwatli, and the Populists led by Nazim Qudsi and Rushdi Kikhya--appear politically impotent.

Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000300190017-2

~~SECRET~~